



An Immigrant's Story

The House of Six Doors Abridged
for Limited English Proficiency Students

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Limited English Proficiency Study Guide

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Introduction

This study guide is intended to assist both the teacher and the students in a variety of ways. It is written in a “modular” way so as to meet the needs of a variety of different teaching situations and objectives. Some teachers will assign *An Immigrant’s Story: The House of Six Doors Abridged* as extensive reading, in which case it is likely that very little intervention or guidance will be wanted. However, some teachers will choose to use the memoir as a supplementary text, or even possibly as a text from which to teach a limited range of reading skills. For these learning situations, guidance in the form of different types of activities and comprehension questions are provided.

The guide includes the following:

1. Student comprehension questions
2. Teacher-led discussion questions
3. A chapter-by-chapter list of lexical items

Chapter 1

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Have students locate Curaçao, Colombia, and Miami on maps either in the classroom or online.
2. Ask students to share whatever they might know about Curaçao or islands nearby and Colombia.
3. Give students an opportunity to share their memories of arriving in the U.S. and their first experiences.
4. Have students make a list or note in the book the aspects of American culture which Mama, Patricia, and Hendrika are surprised or confused by.
5. Have students discuss the issues of immigrants being made to feel “less than”, “ignorant”, or worse because they do not know English or the ways of the country they are moving to. Discuss how this is shown in Chapter 1.
6. After completing, or midway through Chapter 1, have students compare their experiences and especially their expectations, disappointments, and positive experiences upon arrival in the U.S. with those of Patricia, Hendrika, and Mama. Ask them to discuss how the changes they found might encourage immigrants to hold on to old ways.
7. Have students discuss what aspects of Chapter 1 show the reader about the culture Patricia and her family are coming from?
8. Have students discuss the durability of culture and the fact that Mama has lived in various places, yet still is as culture bound to her own culture as those that have never been outside their own culture. Have students discuss this in terms of their own experiences and the experiences of others they know. Do they know of people who can not, or choose not to, adapt to a new culture? What do they think the factors might be that prevent some from adapting while others seem to find an easier way into the culture? Ask students if it could have anything to do with age?
9. Discuss Patricia’s first observations of America. What does she notice? What did they first notice? Have students think about and discuss what they think Americans would first notice about their countries.

10. Discuss cultural differences. Note that Patricia’s mother tries to function as she would in Curaçao. Does she do this because she isn’t observant, or isn’t aware of having to change? How do new immigrants learn what changes they need to make to be appropriate in a new culture?
11. Discuss stereotyping. Use the custom officials at the airport and their opinion of Mama to illustrate this. Ask students to consider the aspects of their cultures that often get stereotyped and how that makes them feel.

Chapter 2

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Have students make a list of the things Mama does that come from her home culture such as using herbs to bless the journey and the car. Ask the students to describe any customs like these that they or their parents have brought with them from their home countries.
2. Have students compare transportation in the U.S. today with transportation in their own countries, e.g., the dependence on cars vs. public transportation, the price of public transportation, the quality of the roads, the need to get places quickly in the U.S., etc.
3. Immigration often disrupts families because some family members aren’t able to come to the new country. Have students discuss how going to Columbia and coming to the U.S. disrupted Patricia’s family. Have students reflect on the changes in their own families as a result of immigrating to the U.S.
4. Have students discuss poor and wealthy areas of their own countries and those of the parts of the U.S. that they have seen. Have them talk about sense of community or lack thereof, safety, employment, housing, neighborhoods, and racism or prejudices.
5. When Patricia smiles at the men outside the motel, she isn’t reading cultural signals accurately. Have students discuss memories they have of misreading cultural signals that they can remember themselves from their early days in the U.S.
6. Have students discuss race issues related to color, social status, and wealth in the U.S. and in their own countries.
7. When the family is being chased, Mama seems to pray to both religious and cultural deities. When she decides to go to Hollywood, she uses a crystal pendulum to help her decide. Have students discuss the mix of cultures and beliefs that this illustrates. Have them reflect on similar mixes in their own families.
8. Mama has unrealistic dreams for her children, perhaps fueled in part by the hope of immigration to a better life, in part by the American dream of anyone being able to do anything and in part by the type of person Mama is. Have students discuss the dreams and expectations their families immigrated with as compared with the expectations they have now.

Chapter 3

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Have students discuss and compare attitudes towards religion and spiritualism in their home countries and the U.S.
2. Discuss students' beliefs in destiny and being able to tell the future as the souls that Mama communicates with do for her. Have them discuss what they believe regarding séances, fortune tellers, and psychics.

Chapter 4

Have students discuss the following topics

1. How realistic or unrealistic are Mama's hopes for her daughters as the family reaches Los Angeles? What does this tell you about Mama?
2. Why are Patricia's first impressions of Los Angeles and Hollywood important, and how do they help you predict what might happen?
3. What are Mama's thoughts about money? Find examples in the chapter to support your answer. What is your opinion of the way Mama handles her money? If you were Mama, would you have done the same or would you have done things differently?
4. The family is often finding they have problems because they aren't familiar with how things are done in the new culture, for example, putting the furniture outside at the first motel they stay in and being told they can't sleep on the street in L.A. How do immigrants learn about what they can and cannot do? Have students make a list of things they learned.
5. Ramon helps the family because he empathizes with their situation, and possibly sees people he could be friends with. In your experience, how helpful have other immigrants been to you in your early days?
6. How do Patricia's memories of Oma's stories about Mama explain Mama's character?
7. Patricia and Hendrika seem to be a little more observant and adaptable to American culture than Mama. Find examples in the chapter that illustrate this.
8. How well does each member of the family speak English? How was your English when you arrived?
9. How does Mama feel about race and the color of people's skin? Many racial issues are brought up in the description of Curaçao's culture. Compare race in the lives of the students currently and in their own home cultures.

Chapter 5

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Patricia's expectations are continuing to change. In this chapter she begins to realize that not everyone in the U.S. is rich. What experiences does she have that bring her to that conclusion?

2. Patricia reads the newspaper comics to help her learn English. What other language learning strategies is she using? What are some other helpful language learning strategies new immigrants use who don't speak English? How did you learn as much as you know?
3. Hendrika and Mama know that the Pussycat Go-Go Club is a bad place, but they need money. What do you think of Mama's decision to let Hendrika work there? What else could she have done instead? What would you have done in a similar situation?
4. Discuss the six doors in the House of Six Doors. What is the function of each door? What is the relevance of Patricia remembering this now? Where is she seeing these character traits exhibited in real life?

Chapter 6

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Discuss Hendrika's symptoms and why you think she is being distant to her sister? Which of Hendrika's dreams have been broken?
2. The girls seem to need Mama's permission and approval for most of the things they do. Compare this with American teens that you know and their relationships with their mothers.
3. Hendrika and Patricia both have possessions that they brought from home that remind them of home: Hendrika's record albums and Patricia's horseback riding ticket. How do these things make the girls feel? What kinds of things do you have that remind you of home?
4. Mama has a different idea of medicine and child birth than the doctors she works with. This is a culture "clash." How did Mama deal with the situation? How would you have dealt with it? Are there any things you have encountered that you thought were done better in your culture? How did you deal with it?
5. Discuss Mama's beliefs about destiny and Oma's beliefs about souls and how they return. How do these beliefs compare with yours?
6. When Mama tells Victor that they were staying in a motel instead of in their car, she's lying because she is ashamed. Discuss why she is ashamed of staying in the car. Also, how do you think she feels about having to ask Victor for help with the rent? What other times has she had to ask for help so far in the story?
7. Patricia notices that Victor's family is proud that their apartment looks like an American's apartment and has no signs of their home culture. What does Patricia think of this? Why do you think the family wanted to do this? How many things do you have in your home, that are from your culture? Describe them.
8. Do you know anyone who has been homeless, i.e., living on the street or in a car? Discuss why it is so hard to break the cycle of homelessness.
9. Patricia cries because she is no longer a child. How would things have been different for her in this way if they hadn't come to the U.S.? Discuss how the same thing has happened to Hendrika and why.

Chapter 7

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Why does Patricia decide to not tell her grandmother and her sister Willia the details of their lives in America?
2. Patricia realizes she didn't appreciate many of the things she left behind. What are some of those things? What things did you have, that you never appreciated before you left?
3. The girls become undocumented. How does this change their lives?
4. Mama is constantly upset that the family is considered "low class." How does she indicate this? What are Mama's ideas about who they are and about class in general? How do these ideas about class compare with the ideas about class in your culture and in the U.S.?
5. What kind of school do you think the McNaughton School is? What type of students go there?
6. Mama seems like a different person to Patricia when she is delivering the baby for Victor's family. Doing this makes Mama feel good about herself. Compare this to how Hendrika felt about herself when she was dancing, and how Patricia felt about herself at school. Discuss the importance of doing what you want to do or feel good about doing, and the difficulty for most people, who do not have the opportunity to do this.

Chapter 8

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Patricia's teacher or school didn't seem to know anything about English as a Second Language (ESL) or dealing with students who didn't speak English. Why do you think that was? Why did Mama send Patricia to a school with no ESL classes? What do you think Miss Lucy should or could have done differently?
2. Patricia is so lost at school that she doesn't even know what questions to ask or where to start. Share times when you felt that way in a class or in school.
3. Do you think Mama helped Patricia with school? How could Mama have helped Patricia with her problems at school?
4. Sandu and Radu are refugees from Romania. How are refugees different from other immigrants? What countries do most refugees come from now?
5. Why do you think Patricia starts to have feelings for Sandu so quickly? What's your opinion of the age difference between the two.
6. Mama took the family to Columbia so that the children could have a better education and then to the U.S. to have a better life, while Sandu had to leave his family and his life in Romania for political reasons. These are typical immigrant and refugee stories. How is your immigration story similar to either of these?
7. Patricia says she wishes there were more things to remind her of home in her house. What kinds of things do you have in your home that remind you of your home country?

8. It's often difficult to maintain a balance of more than one culture for young immigrants. Discuss what kinds of things from home are good to maintain, and what kinds of things it is better to adapt to an American culture? What are some of the ways that you are "bi-cultural?"
9. Patricia and Hendrika are making friends mainly with other immigrants. Why is this easier and more comfortable for the girls? How were your experiences similar or different from theirs?
10. After meeting Sandu, Patricia seems to become more aware of her need to learn English and also more frustrated by her poor English skills. Do you remember having a point at which you felt either of these things? What motivated you to learn English? At what point did you begin to take on the learning of English as something you wanted and/or needed to do rather than something everyone else thought you should do?

Chapter 9

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Hendrika tells Mama that she was irresponsible to bring the family to the U.S. when she couldn't take care of them all, and that Hendrika was the responsible one for finding a way to make money when they needed it. In your opinion, is Hendrika right? If you had been Hendrika, would you have done the same? What else could Mama and Hendrika have done instead?
2. Mama asks Ramon to marry Hendrika in a "marriage of convenience" so she can get a green card. What is your opinion of this? Why do you think Mama didn't ask Hendrika first?
3. Ramon agrees to marry Hendrika to help the family. Why do you think he did this? What would you have done if you had been Ramon? Give reasons for your decision.
4. Mama married without her father's approval. Do you know anyone else who has done this? How important is it to you to have your parents' approval of the person you want to marry?
5. Patricia is afraid Mama will not approve of Sandu. What is she afraid will happen? Compare this situation to the way people who marry without parental approval feel.

Chapter 10

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Hendrika has made some new friends that neither Patricia nor Sandu like. What do you think might be wrong with these friends? Why do you think Hendrika wants to be friends with these new people? What would you do if a sibling or a friend became friends with people you didn't like?
2. Mama and the girls go to an astrologer. What is your experience with fortune tellers or astrologers? This astrologer talks about souls and people knowing each other in different lifetimes. What are your beliefs in this area?
3. The astrologer upsets both Mama and Patricia at different times. Both Mama and Patricia decide the astrologer isn't good. What does she tell them that upsets them?

4. Patricia is in love with Sandu and wants to have sex with him. Hendrika and Inez don't want her to. What are your opinions about this? Do you think Inez should have given Patricia the birth control pills? What might you have done in the same situation?
5. Patricia "blackmails" Hendrika by telling her she'll tell Mama about Hendrika's drugs if she doesn't let Patricia go to Sandu's. What does this do to their relationship? What is your opinion of Patricia's behavior? What do you think of Hendrika's decision? What would you have done if you were Hendrika?
6. Patricia is beginning to understand her responsibility towards taking care of her mother. What is your opinion about this? Is she too young or the right age to be thinking about this? What do you think Patricia owes her mother?

Chapter 11

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Oma told Patricia that life is a game and that you win the game by leaving this world with more love than you came in with. What does Oma mean by this and why would this make Mama angry? Is Mama living her life this way?
2. Oma says that material things are not important. She also says that love is the only thing that is important. What does she mean by material things? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
3. Oma tells Patricia not to turn love into hate. Where in the story do you see love turning or turned into hate?
4. Mama tells Patricia that her children don't love her. Do you think Mama truly believes this? What does this say about her as a person?

Chapter 12

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Immigrants and refugees often have to deal with issues surrounding deaths of loved ones who are far away. What are your experiences with this and how has your family or people you know dealt with it?
2. When Cayetano asks Hendrika to drive his family around the U.S., Hendrika realizes she has to ask Mama first. Mama is angry that Cayetano didn't ask her first. Mama is judging Cayetano based on her home culture's values. What other examples of this have you noticed?
3. Mama wants Hendrika to get paid to drive Cayetano's family around. Do you think she is right or wrong? Why?
4. Sandu doesn't know about the law against having sex with someone under the age of 16. No one knew that Hendrika should have gone back to Curaçao to apply for a visa. Earlier in the story, Mama and the girls didn't know they were breaking the law when they tried to park their car on the streets all night. Why don't they know about these laws? Have you or someone you know ever broken a law that you didn't know about? How did you find out about the rules, regulations, and laws when you first arrived?

Chapter 13

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Hendrika still feels a lot of responsibility for taking care of Mama. Do you think this is because of their culture, or because of the particular circumstances of this family? How do family relations between children and parents in the U.S. compare to those in your cultures?
2. Patricia has a lot to worry about for a 14 year old. How do you think she is handling it? How does this compare with your mid teenage years? How would you handle it?
3. Racism has appeared several times in the book. Discuss the different examples of racism. Discuss your experiences with racism in the U.S., and in your home countries.
4. Patricia says that Sandu is taking full advantage of what the U.S. has to offer, but clearly she is not. Explain how this makes Patricia feel. What do you think she could be doing about it?
5. Mama rejects Sandu's request to date her daughter. What are her reasons? Do you think she is right or wrong? What would you have done?
6. Mama's decision to put Patricia into a private school she couldn't afford is only one of many bad decisions she has made. Discuss the other bad decisions you think Mama has made in the story. Discuss why you think she made them.
7. Mama puts a lot of pressure on Patricia by telling her that she is her reason for living and reminding her of the sacrifices she's made for her. Why do you think Mama is telling Patricia this? What does she want? How does this make Patricia feel?

Chapter 14

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Discuss Patricia's visit to the DMV. She gets her license even though she is not legal in the U.S.. Is this possible today? How does driving make her feel?
2. Patricia has chosen a field that requires a good command of English. What do you think of her dreams and ambitions? How realistic are they at this point? What help will she need in order to succeed?
3. When Patricia drives to school, she hesitates between going to Sandu's apartment and getting to school. Where does she decide to go? What does her choice show about how she has changed as a person?

Chapter 15

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Holidays are always difficult times for people living far away from their families. Discuss the holidays you celebrate differently in your home countries. Do you celebrate any American holidays? If so, which ones?
2. Sandu and Patricia choose a tree that costs \$15. Approximately how much do Christmas trees cost now?

3. Sandu works in a restaurant with a lot of other immigrants. Is this typical of the restaurant industry where you live in the U.S., as well? Why do you think this is?
4. Patricia is still having problems at school because of her English. How are things different in colleges today regarding students with language needs?

Chapter 16

Have students discuss the following topics

1. Patricia doesn't think Sandu would like Curaçao. How are the things he likes and is used to different from the things she is used to? How might these things affect a relationship?
2. Patricia talks about how familiar it feels to be back in Curaçao. She says it is like wearing a pair of old pajamas. What places would make you feel that way?
3. Patricia hears worrying things about Hendrika. Why doesn't she know how Hendrika is? Why haven't they been in contact? How did people stay in contact with one another in the 1970's. How do people stay in touch with one another now?
4. People who go home after years away often are surprised at how different things are. Which things really are different and which only seem different because of the changes in Patricia? How might this be the case for you?
5. Patricia feels that the experience of moving to the U.S. was the cause of Hendrika's falling apart. Discuss your opinion about this. Do you know anyone for whom the immigrant experience has been destructive?
6. Willia says that she can't help Hendrika until Hendrika wants to be helped. This is often the case with people who are in need. Discuss situations you are familiar with that are like this.
7. Willia says the good side of Mama is that she sees no limits. What are the positive and negative sides of that character trait?
8. Willia discovers Patricia's secret problem. Is she the first person to discover this? How does Patricia feel now that Willia knows? Many people have secrets they don't want anyone to know. What other kinds of secrets do people keep about themselves?
9. Willia shows Patricia that it is her responsibility to ask for the help she needs. What kind of help do you think Willia is referring to?
10. What do you think will happen once Patricia returns to the U.S.? How will things be different for her?

Introduction

The vocabulary that is listed in this guide is a list of phrases, idiomatic expressions, and individual words that it was thought might either be useful for students to learn, or lexical items that might cause comprehension problems. Note, however, that most of the items listed are not ones that are likely to cause any serious comprehension problems, i.e., aren't necessary for students to understand in order to understand the story. Note also that, once again, it is expected that individual teachers will pick and choose the items they think are most useful for their students. For each chapter, the list of items is much larger than any one teacher would want to use. The items are listed in the order in which they appear in the book; they are not alphabetized or ordered in any other way. Items were chosen with intermediate to advanced students in mind.

There are various ways to use this list. For example, teachers may want to look through the list and choose phrases or words that they think would be particularly useful for their students. Students could then be given that list and asked to scan for the items after they finish a particular selection or chapter as further scanning practice. They could then be shown how to use the context to help them guess at the meaning of each item. Some teachers may want to give the students a list of items to look out for while they are reading, and then use that list as target lexical items to be quizzed later. Some teachers may even want to choose a selection of items to pre-teach or use as a preview or prediction activity. Finally, some teachers may just want to refer students to the list to self-select the items they want to learn. Whatever way this list is used, it is recommended that students be shown how to start and maintain a vocabulary notebook as a life-long learning activity. Note that many of the items are listed in phrases to help students understand the utility of learning words with the words they collocate with rather than learning them as individual items.

Chapter 1

fluttering hands
 hazel eyes
 a deepening frown
 darting eyes
 reluctantly
 shrugged her shoulders
 surrounded
 stone-faced
 roll your eyes
 sneak something by someone
 grumble
 to order someone to do something
 shake your head in an expres-
 sion of disgust
 huddle together
 squirm around in a seat
 my heart pounded
 my stomach was turning
 clasp your hands together
 essence
 prosperity
 obsession
 snapped
 trivial
 repetitious
 soothing and lyrical
 pleaded
 slouched
 head hung down
 confiscated
 attempted bribery
 embark on a new life
 straw
 a whiff of stale air
 lament
 midwifery
 valid
 outrage
 assume
 investigate
 to storm out of a place
 stride
 reassure
 dominant

daring
 embarrassed by someone or
 something
 ashamed of something or some-
 one
 state of mind
 period of darkness
 ungrateful
 harm oneself
 to be stranded
 to be crushed
 to have an air of self-importance
 to plot a route

Chapter 2

bless
 behind the wheel
 potholes and ruts
 paved
 lush
 dawn on me
 fiddle with the radio dial
 a glimpse
 in awe
 to be assertive
 a wildlife refuge
 a speedway
 billboards
 confront
 illuminate
 dim
 abandoned
 empty lots
 strewn with trash
 my stomach churned
 trace our way back
 a large afro
 to outrun someone
 tapped
 rear bumper
 gulp
 cheer
 my heart was racing
 envy
 mounds of food

stare longingly
 leftovers
 the morgue
 filled to capacity
 humiliated
 ridiculed
 spellbound
 stunned
 ensuring
 smile bitterly
 inadequate
 a rest stop
 disgustingly dirty
 monotonous
 gnarled shrubs and cacti
 the excitement had worn off
 suspect
 purposely
 melancholic
 on our guard
 lacked
 a scar

Chapter 3

a ghost town
 off-ramp
 hammocks
 vibrant
 souls
 empathy
 forgiveness
 a slave
 a warrior
 a monk
 enticing
 to pass up
 disrespectful
 to call the dead
 disapproval
 furious
 scolded
 firecracker
 turn-of-the-century outfits
 horse-drawn carriages

Chapter 4

mood
suffocating
glamorous
pedestrians
a parking meter
work double shifts
be singled out
beige halter top
platform shoes
chubby
marvel
constantly monitor
evaluate
to mold our opinion
browse
a disdainful sniff
lament
pimps
chipped
gray cast
false eyelashes
a slim chance
exceptional
mowed lawns
to acknowledge
the passerby
inherited
disguised by
a strong scent of Lysol
germs
bore an expression
sheer delight
flattered
auditioning
a broad grin
cringe
duck away
feeling light-headed
blushing
stand slumped
her body stiffened
to shrink with humiliation
relieved

gesture
overly affectionate
trying to appear sophisticated
a big sacrifice
humble
veterinary medicine
not recognize a diploma
hire a coyote
to smuggle a person
to sponsor someone
to pay my way through school
a dirty look
coincidence
a deck of tarot cards
cut the deck in two
ruin
desolation
deception
convenience
disillusion
stubborn
predictions
upholstered in gold brocade
a crystal bowl
my heart raced
the creaking of the floors
making sense of the world
disintegrated

Chapter 5

the early light of dawn
a return address
to renew a license
embrace
have a tendency
to raise her voice
certainty
to reassure us
the only sane thing
enrage Mama
leave us worse off
smog
a gloomy cast
bleak surroundings

give someone the creeps
reflective glass
reappear
inspect
outraged
low-cut dress
annoyed
fixing up
show you out
cheeks sag
urgency
in the pit of my stomach
to despair
abundance of food
ration
a rocking motion
anticipation
my jaw dropped
she beamed
recall the memory
to yearn for
her eyes were glazed
bewitched or bedeviled
to slouch
to kidnap
terrified
trade winds
flow through
gratitude
wisdom
compassion
greed
ignorance
anger
disintegrated

Chapter 6

brakes fail
seem more distant
nap
pray
brush someone off
incense cones
cleans someone

a depressed mood
 evil eye
 jealousy
 suspect
 grease-stained hands
 hardly touch food
 to be fully in charge
 metal railings
 balcony rails
 a stooped old lady
 smile broadly
 endear someone to something
 tilt his head
 first, last, and deposit
 pay in installments
 good tenants
 decor
 a trace of
 a vacant apartment
 off- white
 to verify
 to sprawl across
 an outrageous ideas
 to fling something open
 butchers
 convenient
 induce and perform Caesarians
 harm
 schedule
 first encounter
 disrespectful
 umbilical cord
 procedures
 connect with their mothers
 midwife
 expectant mothers
 delaying
 ruin someone's life
 fragile
 contradictions
 emotional
 impulsive
 argumentative
 frightened
 isolated
 rejected

perceive our essence
 swivel
 tears well up

Chapter 7

complain bitterly
 cringe
 find your fortune
 nursery
 degrading
 madness
 harmonious
 to take someone or something
 for granted
 expired visas
 feel uneasy
 officially
 illegal aliens
 status
 feel excluded and unwanted
 to escort someone somewhere
 amazed
 lobby
 lined with photos
 the long-haired students
 tight, faded jeans
 impressed
 a breeding ground for drugs
 badly behaved children
 study diligently
 sneak out
 defeated
 cramped
 curriculum
 mostly self-taught
 conventional
 freak
 turkey baster
 contractions
 bent double from the pain
 kneel
 grunt
 cradl it in your hands
 spellbound
 scoot

Chapter 8

mimick
 burden
 strip mall
 irritable
 look rustic
 a festive feeling
 to beckon someone with your
 hands
 to snap your fingers
 struggling
 feel awkward
 seem nosy
 take courage and faith
 desperation
 scurry quickly
 balmy Caribbean evenings
 self-doubt
 fluff your hair
 perimeter of the dance floor
 say something insistently
 be yearning for
 siblings
 blacklisted
 on purpose
 a precious commodity
 shiver
 extravagant
 outrageous colors
 envision
 intrigue
 in reality
 lose all sense of space and time
 his voice jolted me back
 I felt myself stiffen
 glisten
 prosperity
 nourish
 tears erupt
 to stow the luggage
 the dismemberment of a family

Chapter 9

appearance
 as tense as a bull about to be released into the arena
 stand up for yourself
 collapse
 paralyzed
 struck by lightning
 snarled in disbelief
 motionless
 irresponsible
 twitching
 statue
 my heart ached
 cheered her up
 elegant
 a big appetite
 sniffing
 marvelous
 distracting
 sensible
 ask something gravely
 be rude
 deport
 marry on paper
 hiss
 glare
 fume
 grind your teeth
 palpable tension
 to scowl at someone
 to be about to explode
 to break the silence
 to make a toast
 a hopeful grin
 being manipulative and disrespectful
 to glower at someone
 erect, stiff posture
 opposition
 persist
 keep the pressure on
 exasperated
 submit
 shoulders slumped

committed to an insane asylum
 inevitable
 his face lit up
 scattered in the mountains
 ancient wall drawings
 entire basilicas
 carved into them
 freckles
 to be flustered by someone's
 compliment
 go out
 apprehensively
 exhausted
 landscape
 flat expanse
 sagebrush
 sincerity
 strictly
 trickle through my fingers
 pavement crackled
 drowsy voice
 slot machines
 tokens
 play roulette
 indignantly
 enthusiasm
 heart-shaped wreaths
 a sprawling grass lawn
 a faded tuxedo
 list of options
 a pitiful smile
 so humiliating
 a limp body
 a boom box
 radiance
 the gleam in her eyes

Chapter 10

smog-shrouded skies
 welcome relief
 dreary lives
 awkward
 domineering
 an uneasy feeling
 to dismiss someone's warnings
 becoming absent-minded

to be elegant
 graceful
 distant behavior
 faces of disgust
 delighted to see someone
 stroll toward
 shabby section
 astrologer
 blunt
 overbearing
 emotional
 impulsive
 courageous
 tend to
 neglect relationships
 prosperity
 elude you
 psychic abilities
 disillusionment
 pursue worldly riches
 spiritual riches
 mysticism
 to make no sense
 an urge
 swirling
 chanting
 complete bliss
 stubborn persevering
 tendency to overindulgence
 to illuminate
 to attend to
 to nourish
 enlightened
 dusk
 to depart this world
 sneaky
 threats
 panic
 curse oneself
 a stern face
 her eyes narrowed
 assumption
 my insecurity
 vagabonds
 tie in knots
 any sense of accomplishment

Chapter 11

pique someone's interest
 feel tortured
 a thrift store
 no trace
 tied down with rules
 pursed lips
 tragedy
 inheritance
 feel overwhelmed
 restrictions
 motionless
 exhilarated
 transcends
 gripped by tension
 her words devastated me

Chapter 12

ration food
 not promising
 opportunism
 to have to cope
 take someone for granted
 keep Mama steady
 not object
 the dates are set
 have a point
 meetings become irregular
 rotate days off
 our code
 his good intentions
 gloominess
 anxiously awaited
 monotonous
 resigned
 withdrawn
 angry and ranting
 my heart ached
 grieve
 groggily
 choke up
 intensity of the situation
 coming around
 different schemes

being vigilant
 agonizing over
 petitioned
 temporary visa
 a wistful smile
 authorities
 a broken federal law
 not respectful
 to feel betrayed
 diminished ability
 to be banned from
 her face tightened
 to sit rigidly
 wagged her index finger
 appeal for understanding
 a newfound love
 to get out of doing something

Chapter 13

to deceive ourselves
 to face the truth
 days creep by
 organize life into compartments
 feel frustrated
 accomplish something
 overdue notice
 stash something away
 behind her back
 ponder
 prevail
 qualify for a scholarship
 say something formally
 gorgeous
 be superior
 something left behind
 attentiveness
 a noble profession
 backtrack
 baffled me

Chapter 14

tricky
 proceed outside
 technically

detect
 a faint sense of pride.
 debate something
 the ramp
 get off track

Chapter 15

smuggle
 recite
 keep up with
 withdrawn

Chapter 16

eagerly
 a stark room
 my skirt fluttered
 vigorously
 regaining something
 glancing at me out of the corner
 of her eye
 board up
 dry and brittle
 reluctant
 humiliated
 deny
 say something matter- of-factly
 feeling sorry for myself
 a frail body
 eyes cast down
 imprisoned
 a chain-link fence
 reduced to rubble
 sobbing
 mourning
 trade winds caressed my face
 to pursue
 my rekindled dream

Introduction

Each chapter has a set of questions that the teacher can pick and choose from, depending on the class objectives and the level of the students. Note that in most cases there are more questions than most teachers will want or need. The questions are written to guide the students through the story generally, to focus the students on important plot twists and turns, and to help them to get to know the key characters. The questions can be used as pre-reading, during reading, or post-reading activities.

Teachers may choose to direct the students to this PDF, or copy and paste selected questions into their own Word documents adding whatever directions they choose such as one of the following:

- Answer these questions while you read.
- After you finish a unit, scan the reading to find the answers to these questions.
- Work in pairs or groups and discuss the answers to these questions.

Note that these questions were written so that they could be used in any of the following ways:

- a. as questions to think about or respond to while reading;
- b. as questions to think about or respond to after reading, either in class or as homework;
- c. as questions students discuss in pairs or small groups together in class after reading;
- d. as quiz questions.

Chapter 1

Comprehension questions

1. Where do Patricia and her family come from?
2. When does the story take place?
3. What happens in the airport? What do you think the customs officials think of Mama and her daughters? Why is Mama so surprised by what happens?
4. What does the airport experience show you about the relationships between Mama, Hendrika, and Patricia?
5. What does the airport experience show you about the characters of Mama and the two girls? How about their expectations about their new lives in the U.S.?
6. Patricia mentions a TV show called *The Brady Bunch*.” What kind of family do you think this television show depicts? Do these kinds of families exist in real life in your opinion?
7. Discuss the motel where Mama decides they should stay. What are Patricia’s observations about it? What about it seems unwelcoming to her?
8. What happens when Mama and the girls move some furniture outside the room? Why do they do it and what problems does it cause?
9. When the family goes shopping, what about the supermarket surprises Patricia and Hendrika? Compare the shopping experience with their experiences from their home. How do American supermarkets compare with food shopping in your home countries? How is the American supermarket experience symbolic of other cultural differences new immigrants might find?

10. Who is Oma and what do you find out about her relationship with Patricia?
11. Why can't Mama work in Florida?
12. Discuss how Mama feels after finding out she can't work in Florida. What does this tell you about Mama and her emotional and mental states? Discuss what the role of the two girls are in taking care of their mother.
13. Why did Patricia and her family move to Columbia earlier?
14. Why did Patricia's parents get divorced?
15. Discuss the family's experience at the used car lot. How did Mama get the car for the price she wanted?
16. What did Patricia and her family do to prepare for the trip? How are they feeling as they set out?
17. What comparisons with Curaçao did Patricia make? How are the streets, trees, hotel lobby, studio, weather, TV, houses, lawns, and families different?
18. Give examples of things Mama does in Chapter 1 which are culturally inappropriate in the U.S. How do new immigrants learn what they can and cannot do?

Chapter 2

Comprehension Questions

1. What is Mama doing with the herbs as they start out on their trip?
2. Why is Hendrika driving instead of Mama?
3. What is Hendrika's hobby or interest, and what does it tell you about Hendrika?
4. How does Mama feel about Hendrika's interest? Why do you think this might be?
5. What makes Patricia think about her siblings back in Curaçao? What are the different roles her siblings seem to play in the family dynamics? What differences between Willia and Hendrika does Patricia mention?
6. When the family stops in Louisiana, what type of area are they in? Why is Patricia surprised by this?
7. Why does Patricia smile at the men in front of the motel in the first place they stop?
8. What are the family heritages of Patricia's grandparents and parents?
9. What frightening thing happened and what do you think the men were doing? What do you think their plan was?
10. What part of Mama's life does Mama tell the girls about? Why are the girls so surprised?
11. Where does the family sleep during their journey?
12. How does Mama decide to make Hollywood, California their destination? What are her plans for how they will live once they get there?
13. Patricia mentions feeling "special" as they drive across the desert. Why does she think she is special? How is Mama instilling that feeling in her?

14. What are Mama's dreams for her children? Are these dreams realistic? What effect do you think these expectations and dreams may be having on her children?
15. How does Patricia refer to Mama's depression? How do Patricia and Hendrika attempt to handle Mama's depression?

Chapter 3

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Mama want to stop in the ghost town in Arizona? What kind of help is she hoping to find there?
2. What happens in the Arizona ghost town? What do the girls and Mama find there?
3. What are the cultural misunderstandings that Patricia, Hendrika, and Mama encounter in the ghost town?
4. What are Oma's beliefs about souls and people having lived before? How do they differ from Mama's beliefs and practices concerning the dead?
5. Why is what they find in the ghost town particularly disappointing for Mama, and what is the significance of that disappointment in terms of Mama and her ability to adapt to American culture?
6. What does Mama say that hurts Hendrika? How does Hendrika react?

Chapter 4

Comprehension Questions

1. As the family approaches Los Angeles, why is Mama so excited?
2. What are Mama's hopes for her daughters?
3. What are Patricia's first impressions of Hollywood?
4. Why does Patricia start to think everything will be all right? What does this tell you about Patricia as a person?
5. What kind of a motel does the family stay at?
6. Who does the family meet at the motel? How does she help them?
7. What does the family wonder about as they drive around Beverly Hills?
8. What kind of place do you think the Pussycat Go-Go Club is?
9. Where does the family sleep after that, and why? Who do they meet there and why do you think he is so helpful?
10. What are the problems the girls have at the talent agency? Give reasons for your answers using examples from the chapter.
11. What do you learn about the person they meet at the gas station? What were his reasons for coming to the U.S.? What has his time in the U.S. been like so far?
12. What did Patricia learn from Oma about Mama when she was a child?

Chapter 5

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Mama ask for Ramon's address?
2. Why does Mama decide to go to the Pussycat Go-Go Club?
3. Why does the family need to find work so quickly?
4. Where is the Go-Go Club manager from?
5. What kind of dancing do women do at the club?
6. Why is Hendrika so determined to take the dancing job?
7. What is the pink slip in Patricia's purse and where did she get it?
8. Where does Patricia stay when Mama and Hendrika go into the club and why is she so scared?
9. What does Patricia remember in her dream about the House of Six Doors?

Chapter 6

Comprehension Questions

1. What changes in Hendrika does Patricia begin to notice? Make a list.
2. What is in the envelope that Ramon gives Mama?
3. Why do you think Hendrika stops eating as much as the others? Why doesn't she "get better" after she stops working? What do you think might be wrong with her?
4. Where does Mama get a job and what hours does she work?
5. Why can't the family move into an apartment right away?
6. How long has the family been in Los Angeles by this time?
7. Why do you think Victor lets the family move in to the apartment even though they don't have enough money?
8. What is in the trunk that is so important to Hendrika? Why are they so important?
9. What kind of nurse is Mama? What bothers her about the doctors she works with?
10. What did Oma tell Patricia about Mama's birth? What were the problems?
11. Why does Mama tell Victor they were living in a motel instead of in their car?
12. After the family moves in, what does Patricia see in the mirror that makes her sad?

Chapter 7

Comprehension Questions

1. How does the family furnish their home? Why do you think they furnish it this way?
2. What department does Mama ask to be changed to in the hospital? Why?
3. What are the girls afraid that Mama will do if she isn't happy at her job?

4. How has Hendrika changed? Make a list of the things she used to do that she no longer does.
5. What do the girls do while Mama is sleeping after her night job? How do they help out around the house?
6. What happens at the end of January and how did it make Patricia and Hendrika feel?
7. Why can't Hendrika find a good job?
8. What kind of school does Mama want Patricia to go to? Why? Why doesn't she like Hollywood High School?
9. Why does Patricia try to run away, and what does she find when she does?
10. Why is Patricia so unhappy at the McNaughton School?
11. What does Mama do for Victor and his family?

Chapter 8

Comprehension Questions

1. How long does it take for Patricia's teacher, Miss Lucy, to realize Patricia doesn't speak English and isn't doing her homework? Why do you think Miss Lucy isn't helping Patricia?
2. What is the Gypsy Camp and why does Patricia want to go there?
3. What kind of people go to the Gypsy Camp?
4. Who do the girls meet there and where are they from?
5. How does Patricia show that she has romantic feelings for the young man she meets? What is one reason she says that she feels this way? What is the age difference between the two?
6. Why is Patricia able to understand the young man's English?
7. How are Patricia's and this young man's backgrounds different?
8. What memories of Patricia's father does she tell the young man?
9. Why did Mama take the children to Columbia?
10. Why does Patricia feel that their moving to Columbia was the beginning of the break-up of their family?
11. Patricia says she feels "invisible" at school. What does she mean by that and why do you think she feels that way?

Chapter 9

Comprehension Questions

1. Why do Patricia, Hendrika, and Mama go to the movies?
2. Why is Mama so disappointed at the movies?
3. What had Hendrika done to take care of the family and why is she only telling Mama about it now?

4. Why did Mama invite Ramon over for a special dinner? What does she ask him? What is your opinion of the favor Mama asked of Ramon?
5. Why does Ramon agree to it?
6. Sandu wants to meet Mama. Why doesn't Patricia think this is a good idea?
7. Why do Patricia, Hendrika, Mama, and Ramon go to Las Vegas and what happens there?
8. Why is Hendrika so unhappy in Las Vegas, and in life in general?

Chapter 10

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Mama want Ramon and Hendrika to tell each other everything?
2. Why does Ramon stop coming to the house as often?
3. Make a list of the changes that Patricia notices in Hendrika. What do you think is happening to Hendrika?
4. Who is Inez? Where is she from? How does Patricia meet her?
5. What does Patricia find that Hendrika has hidden among her records?
6. Why doesn't Mama like Inez?
7. After Mama and the girls leave the drugstore, they take a walk on Hollywood Boulevard. Patricia notices foods, smells, and other things from various cultures. How many different cultures does she notice?
8. What happens at the astrologer's? What does the astrologer say about Mama? How true do those characteristics sound to you? Which ones are negative and which are positive?
9. What predictions does the astrologer make about Hendrika and Patricia? What does she ask Patricia to do?
10. What character traits does she see in Patricia? How true do these seem to you?
11. What upsetting things does the astrologer tell Patricia when Patricia returns?
12. Inez starts to act like a big sister to Patricia. What advice does she give her and what else does she give her?
13. Why does Hendrika agree not to tell Mama if Patricia goes to Sandu's apartment?
14. Patricia sees a photo of a young woman at Sandu's apartment. Who is it and why does it make her sad?
15. What are Sandu's dreams and plans?
16. Why does Patricia feel that she can't leave Hendrika and Mama and start her own life?

Chapter 11

Comprehension Questions

1. When Patricia returns to the astrologer's, what does she find?
2. What are Inez's hopes, dreams, and plans?
3. What happened to Inez when she was younger?
4. Why does Inez tell Patricia that Sandu is breaking the law?
5. What news do Mama and the girls get in the middle of the night?
6. Who sees Oma and why does this make Mama angry?
7. Why does Mama think her children don't love her? Do you agree?

Chapter 12

Comprehension Questions

1. What are Patricia and Hendrika doing to take care of Mama?
2. What is Cayetano asking Hendrika to do?
3. What parts of Cayetano's request does Mama object to? What does she do about it?
4. Patricia asks Hendrika about taking her camera with her. How does Hendrika answer her and why does this concern Patricia?
5. Why do Patricia and Sandu start meeting at Patricia's apartment instead of Sandu's?
6. What is Sandu's reaction to hearing that it is against the law for him to have sex with someone under 16 years of age?
7. What chores of Hendrika's does Patricia start doing?
8. What is Patricia doing to make sure Mama doesn't take too many sleeping pills?
9. Make a list of the things Patricia does to prevent Mama from falling into a depression.
10. What news do they get from Cayetano in the middle of the night?
11. What will the consequences be for Hendrika if she is found guilty and why?
12. Why can't Ramon help with Hendrika's situation?
13. Who is Maria?
14. Why does Ramon ask Patricia not to tell him about Sandu?
15. How does Mama react to Ramon's news?

Chapter 13

Comprehension Questions

1. Why can't the Netherlands embassy help with Hendrika's problem?
2. Where is Hendrika calling from?
3. What does Hendrika tell Patricia to do for Mama?
4. Patricia is under a lot of stress. List the concerns Patricia mentions.
5. Why does Inez suggest introducing Sandu to Mama?
6. What does Patricia find in the kitchen drawer? Why does this make her feel guilty?
7. How is Sandu's life improving?
8. List the ways Mama is rude to Sandu at first. Why do you think she acts like this?
9. What is Mama's reaction to Sandu and what does she do?
10. Sandu insults Mama to Patricia. What does he say and how does this make Patricia feel?
11. Mama tells Patricia that she is her reason for living. What is the one thing she wants Patricia to do? Why is this a problem for Patricia?

Chapter 14

Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Patricia worried at the DMV? How does she do on the tests?
2. How does driving make Patricia feel?
3. Why does Patricia want to go to San Fernando Valley College?
4. How did Patricia "graduate" high school?
5. What does Patricia want to study in college?
6. What is getting better in Sandu's life?
7. How is Patricia's English at this point?

Chapter 15

Comprehension Questions

1. How did Patricia use to celebrate Christmas back in Curaçao?
2. Why does this holiday make Patricia sad?
3. Why did Oma not want to celebrate Sint Nikolaas Day in Curaçao?
4. What do Patricia and Sandu go shopping for?
5. Who is Daniel?
6. Who did Sandu tell about Patricia?
7. How is Patricia doing at school, and why?
8. What is Mama's surprise for Patricia?

Chapter 16

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Patricia think Sandu wouldn't like Curaçao? List the comparisons she makes between what Sandu likes and what Curaçao is like.
2. Why is Patricia nervous in Miami airport?
3. Who picks Patricia up at Curaçao airport?
4. How long has Patricia been in the U.S.?
5. Why isn't Hendrika at the airport and what does Willia tell Patricia about Hendrika?
6. Patricia notices a lot of changes in Curaçao. What are they? Which things are new and which seem smaller than she remembers?
7. How is Oma's house different?
8. How is Hendrika different? What's wrong with her?
9. What does Patricia show Willia, and what does it symbolize for Patricia?
10. How does Willia figure out that Patricia still has problems with English?
11. What does Willia tell Patricia that helps her feel less ashamed of herself?
12. What does Patricia decide to do as soon as she gets back to the U.S.?
13. What happened to the House of Six Doors while Patricia was in the U.S.?
14. How do you think things will be different for Patricia when she returns to the U.S.?

